



OFFICIAL NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Copiah County Men Charged with Woods Arson

Hazlehurst, MS—Two men have been charged with woods arson in Copiah and Lawrence Counties. Shelton (BO) Coleman age 24 of Wesson and Chester Albert Borne III age 23 of Hazlehurst have been arrested and charged with multiple counts of felony woods arson. As of this time, they have each been charged with four counts of felony woods arson and one count of first degree arson for burning a structure in Copiah County. In Lawrence County they have each been charged with one count felony woods arson and two counts of first degree arson for the burning of two structures.

“This is a good example of different departments and agencies working together to help protect and serve the public” stated Matt Steed, Fire Investigator with the Mississippi Forestry Commission. “We would like to express our thanks and appreciation for all the help from the other agencies involved in this investigation”, said Steed. The agencies involved in the investigation are the Mississippi Fire Marshall’s Office, Copiah County Sheriff’s Office, Lawrence County Sheriff’s Office and the Mississippi Forestry Commission.

In other unrelated cases that the Mississippi Forestry Commission has been working on, two Lawrence County men, Jerry Stamps Sr. and Jerry Stamps Jr., recently received indictments from the Lawrence County Grand Jury for multiple counts of woods arson. These men are also facing other possible indictments in Jeff Davis County as well. This investigation which concluded in February, 2011 took four months to complete and looked into over 40 different wildfires that had been set.

There are currently two cases in Hancock County. Darren Grant Johnson of Perkinston, MS entered a guilty plea earlier this week to one count of felony woods arson. In the second case in Hancock County Eugene M. Butler of Bay Saint Louis, MS was issued a citation on June 10, 2011 and found guilty in the Hancock County Justice Court of a misdemeanor. Mr. Butler had a debris burn escape that spread onto several landowners properties causing damage while Hancock County was under a burn ban. Butler was ordered to pay restitution to the MFC, pay a fine and court cost associated with his case.

In Mississippi, the penalty for felony woods arson is, upon conviction, sentenced to the state penitentiary for not more than two years nor less than one year, or be fined not less than \$200 nor more than \$1,000, or both at the discretion of the court.

Please report any suspicious behavior in regard to a woods fire by calling the Mississippi Forestry Commission's Woods Arson Hotline at 1-800-240-5161. Information leading to the arrest and conviction of a woods arsonist can be rewarded up to \$2,500.

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Don't Burn on Windy Days because Carelessness Causes Wildfires. Check for local burn bans at www.mfc.state.ms.us